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# WHAT THEOSOPHISTS BELIEVE

BY

C. JINARÂJADÂSA

*President of the Theosophical Society*

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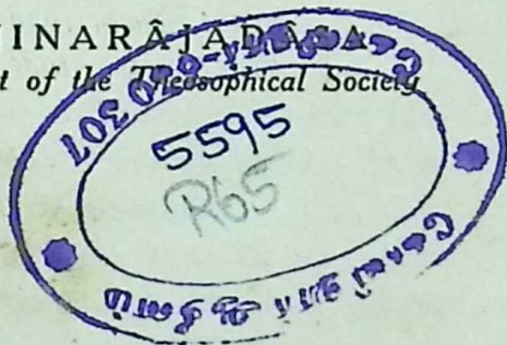
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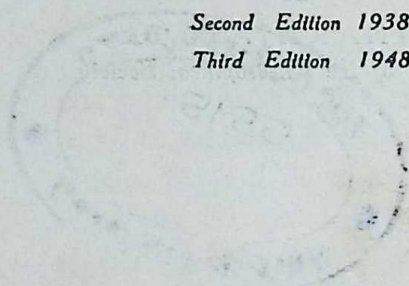
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## WHAT THEOSOPHISTS BELIEVE

### *I. Theosophy as a System of Thought*

THE name THEOSOPHY is an exact translation of the well known Sanskrit term Brahnavidyâ. For it is made up of the two Greek words Theos = God, and Sophia = Wisdom. Its first use was in the third century A.D. in Alexandria by the Greek philosopher Iamblichus. He used

the term to mean the inner knowledge concerning the things of God which were taught in the Greek Mysteries. The word Theosophy to-day has been popularized by the Theosophical Society founded by Madame H. P. Blavatsky, Colonel H. S. Olcott, W. Q. Judge and others.

Theosophy then is a word which signifies a knowledge of Brahman, or the Absolute. The knowledge as to Brahman is found, in the East, in the Upanishads and Hindu philosophies ; in the West, in the philosophies of Pythagoras, Plato and

other Greek philosophers ; in Ancient Egypt ; and in certain mystical teachings which are found to have existed in the early days of Christianity.

To-day, however, Theosophy means a body of philosophical ideas sponsored by Theosophists. These ideas have been briefly summarized by Dr. Annie Besant, the late President of the Theosophical Society, in the following statement :

1. There is one transcendent Self-existent Life, eternal, all-pervading, all-sustaining, whence all worlds derive their several lives, whereby and wherein all



things which exist live and move and have their being.

2. For our world, this Life is Immanent, and is manifested as the Logos, the "Word," worshipped under different Names, in different religions, but ever recognized as the One Creator, Preserver, and Regenerator.

3. Under Him, our world is ruled and guided by a Hierarchy of His Elder Children, variously called Rishis, Sages, Saints, among whom are the World-Teachers, who for each age reproclaim the essential truths of religion and morality in a form suited to the age ; this Hierarchy is aided in its work by the hosts of Beings—again variously named Devas



(Shining Ones), or Angels—discharging functions recognized in all religions.

4. Human beings form one order of the creatures evolving on this earth, and each human being evolves by successive life-periods, gathering experiences and building them into character, reaping always as he sows, until he has learned the lessons taught in the three worlds—the earth, the intermediate state, and the heavens—in which a complete life-period is passed, and has reached human perfection, when he enters the company of “just men made perfect” that rules and guides the evolving lives in all stages of their growth.

Closely analysing the above principles, we find that modern

Theosophy can be described as follows :

1. It is not an atheistic philosophy but the reverse. It starts with the assertion of the existence of a Divine Absolute Principle. This Principle reveals itself in a cosmic process, which is the universe, through a series of Emanations.

2. The universe is a process of the unfoldment of potentialities. These potentialities are both of the universe and of the individual soul. This unfoldment is not a mechanical process but one planned from the beginning by the Creator, who is the

First Emanation, and through whom all successive Emanations appear.

3. The cosmic process is accepted as the Reality and not as a *Mâyâ* or "illusion", though the full and inmost nature of Reality cannot be grasped by the human brain.

4. This process, called Evolution, takes place not only in the visible parts of the universe but also in those more extensive parts of it which are invisible. These invisible parts consist of planes or "*lokas*" or worlds, composed of finer matter.

5. There is a cyclic nature in the development of the universe, since there are periods when activities begin, come to their maximum, and then diminish, to be followed by a period of quietude. During this period of Pralaya or "cessation", however, the results achieved by the work of the universe are not destroyed ; they become germinal, so that at the next awakening of activity the work is carried on from the point where the work was suspended to greater heights.

6. The Absolute emanates souls from within Itself. Therefore every

soul—called a Monad—is fundamentally divine and of the nature of the Absolute, and partakes of Its triple nature of Sat, Chit and Ânanda—Pure Being, Pure Intelligence and Perfect Bliss. But when emanated, the Monads are in a state of unawareness, and they may be thought of as dormant, as the germs in seeds are before they germinate ; they become awake and aware through a process which has been termed “the descent into matter”.

7. This descent into matter is a process in which the dormant

Monads are encased in various "vehicles" or encasements of matter, so as to receive through them vibrations which slowly awaken them into awareness. For long ages the descent takes place in invisible worlds of matter, in grades of life called by the Theosophist "elemental kingdoms". Then in the downward descent, the Monad becomes encased in mineral matter, then later in vegetable forms, and later still in the forms of animals. The Monad is still dormant ; the first signs of his awakening are seen when an animal responds to human affection, or



when the animal's intelligence shows conscious adaptation under human guidance. Thereupon follows a great climax, which is a quickening into self-conscious evolution. This climax is termed by the Theosophist "individualization". Thenceforth he is an individual soul separate from other souls, though sharing with them all a common Divine Nature and origin, therefore forming with all an indivisible Universal Brotherhood. After individualization the soul becomes aware of the purpose of his existence as a Monad, which is to reveal and realize his innate



Divinity, and to further the Plan of Evolution.

8. From individualization onwards, the soul now identifies himself consciously with the process of unfoldment which already has been taking place in himself through long ages. The process is now hastened through rebirth, that is to say, by repeated incarnations in human bodies. There is no reversion to animal incarnations, as no experiences useful for the growth of the soul can be obtained through the small and primitive brains of animals.

9. From the moment of individualization, when conscious evolution begins, there comes into operation a law of evolution called the Law of Karma. Briefly summarized, it means that as a soul does right, that is, in accordance with the Divine Will, the result of his action creates for him conditions which help his unfoldment ; whereas when he does wrong, that is, acts contrary to the Divine Will, the result creates for him conditions which thwart his unfoldment.

10. From this standpoint, good Karma is what helps the Divine

Plan of Evolution, and evil Karma what puts obstacles in the way of that Plan. Good Karma adds to the harmony in the universe established by the Divine Will, and so produces for the doer both happiness and opportunities for further growth. Evil Karma creates a discord in the harmony by opposing the working of the Divine Will ; the harmony must be restored by the evil-doer at the cost of pain. Karma has therefore been called the Law of Adjustment. There is no thought of punishment in Karma, any more than there is when we burn

ourselves ; the fire does not punish us ; we create pain for ourselves by infringing the laws of nature through our ignorance of them.

11. Rebirth life after life has as its purpose the gaining of experience, so that the soul may become an expert in right action. Since the purpose of existence is to be a conscious co-worker with Divinity, a life of righteousness becomes the highest mode both of fulfilling the Divine Plan, and of unfolding the highest in one's self. But this perfect life is not achieved at once. Many experiments have to be made

by the soul before he knows for himself what are the fundamental laws of righteousness which exist in his own inmost nature. For, every law of right conduct proclaimed to him by the great Founders of the Religions is only an exteriorization of the Divine Nature latent within him. But he must be sure that the law is his own and not another's. Through many a blunder, and at the cost of suffering due to his ignorance, at last he discovers his own true Self.

12. All the pains which come as the result of blunders in testing the

Divine Law have as their purpose Adjustment or Rectification, in order to make the soul aware of the existence of Law. Misery and suffering have as their ultimate gain the illumination of the soul. Similarly too, through co-operation with the Law, and from the resultant joy and happiness, the soul grows in illumination.

These general ideas of the Theosophical philosophy are further developed by the following teachings. Rebirth takes place in the many races of the world. In fact, the many races which appear age

after age are part of the Divine Plan, so that through incarnations in them the souls may gain the necessary experiences. Each race that appears in the course of the world's history has its particular variations in the structure of the physical body, not only in differences of colour, texture of hair, etc., but also in various differences of response, through brain structure and through nerves, to visible and invisible influences. Each race with its special characteristics is intended to awaken certain aptitudes which are latent in the soul. Since



each race has its habitat in a part of the globe with particular characteristics of land and sea, these characteristics are intended to mould the forms of response on the part of the soul to the influences of the Divine which surround him all the time, and are striving to awaken him. The varying race traditions in the many races and countries of the world are all intended to awaken some attribute of knowledge or power or love which is dormant in the soul.

In the process of Reincarnation, the soul lives in bodies both of man

and of woman. The two sexes are expressions of two polarities of consciousness and of action in the soul, and the soul, who has within himself the attributes of both sexes, must awaken the highest characteristics of both by incarnation in each sex. There is therefore no superiority in man as man, nor inferiority in woman as woman. In the course of the hundreds of incarnations which are necessary for a soul before he comes to perfection, he will be reborn as often as a woman as a man. The soul will be by turns son, husband

and father, or daughter, wife and mother.

From what has been said, it will be obvious that the soul of man is in the midst of a process which we can well term "becoming aware of its Divine Nature". It is this process that has been termed "Moksha", "Nirvana", "Salvation", or "Liberation". But these terms do not signify escape from any danger or ending of existence as such. The terms signify the freeing of the soul from the ignorance which surrounds him, and liberating and saving him from his own limitations. Liberation

means, not the ending of activity, but rather the beginning of self-conscious and beneficent activities of far nobler types than are possible while a human being.

After Liberation the soul is a self-conscious worker in the Divine Plan. He is no longer bound by the process of Reincarnation, so that he need not appear any more in a human form. But wherever the liberated soul functions, stage by stage and æon by æon, he becomes a larger embodiment of the wonders of Divinity. His expanding consciousness and increasing capacities

intensify in him the sense of bliss which is his divine heritage, and he lives to shed that bliss on others on this earth as a Jîvanmukta, "liberated yet embodied", or in other planets, solar systems, or stars, or in invisible worlds of being and action.

The ideal of the Theosophist is therefore not to be the soul who has freed himself to enter into some kind of a unity of bliss with the Divine, thus completely forgetting the millions of his fellow-men who are still struggling in darkness though proceeding all towards Liberation. On the contrary, his ideal is that of the

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“Master of the Wisdom” who renounces for a period the bliss of Liberation so as to continue to be a worker for mankind. Freed from all limitations imposed on him by the process of evolution, his very freedom makes him rejoice all the more that he is free now to help his fellow-men.

One of the very important ideas which dominate the Theosophical philosophy is this conception of great Adepts, who are not merely Sannyâsis or recluses meditating and thereby radiating peace and blessing, but are far more directors or agents



of the evolutionary process for the benefit of man, and working under divine guidance. The Theosophist continually talks of "the Divine Plan", meaning thereby a Plan of the evolutionary process formulated by the Logos which is being steadily put into execution by His agents, who are Emanations of Himself. The perfected man is the Adept who has linked his liberated consciousness with that of the Logos, the Ocean of Divinity, and thenceforth is in a manner an Avatâra who has descended from on high. He has still within him, however, all the



attributes of humanity, with the memories of his past struggles, joined to the Divine Consciousness which is now his. The Adept is not merely an embodiment of Divinity but he is also utterly perfect in human sympathy.

These perfected men, according to the Theosophist, work in graded ranks. They form an organization called the Great Hierarchy or the Great White Brotherhood. They are not all of equal capacity because some achieved Liberation ages ago and others but recently, and therefore the former have a longer record

of work and experience. But all of them are united by one Will, which is to serve the Plan of God for men. They are the flowers of the evolutionary process among men, since their consciousness is all the time in intimate communion with that of the Divine. The Adepts are of seven types of temperament or action called the Seven Rays. They have three Chiefs under whose orders they work, and these Chiefs are called respectively, 1. The Lord of the World, who is the Head of the Great Hierarchy, 2. the Buddha, and 3. the Mahâ Chohan.

The work of the Adept Brotherhood consists of the supervision of all our world's processes visible and invisible. Associated with them are various types of angelic orders of souls of other forms of evolution who are called Devas or Angels. There are grades among them, some being the Great Devas and other lesser or minor Devas, but all also work under the direction of the Head of the Great Hierarchy. The Adepts and the Devas working in unison have as their tasks :

- (1) To supervise all physical phenomena concerning Nature.

What we usually term natural laws are in reality forces which are controlled and directed by mighty Devas and Adepts.

(2) The many types of races and their variants are guided in their origin and in their migrations by the Adepts. Various parts of the earth are peopled according to the needs of humanity. The clash of races and their expansion, the peopling of unoccupied territories, the colonization of foreign lands, etc., are all under the guidance of the Great Hierarchy.

(3) All the religious teaching which appears, either through great religious Founders or through minor Teachers, is directed by the Adepts. The greatest religious Teachers are the Adepts themselves, who appear among mankind to give such type of religion as is best suited for the people to whom they come. Also, wherever there is any religious leader who, though not advanced sufficiently to be an Adept, yet is nevertheless unselfish in his devotion to mankind, such a teacher is inspired by the Adepts. It is well known that even among the traditions of

primitive and barbarous cults of worship among savages, now and then there appear traces of a higher cult of purity and harmless dedication. These higher types are usually attributed by the savages to some wonderful being who once appeared among them. Such a being was one of the Adepts, or one of their disciples, who implanted among the savages the higher teaching.

(4) All the developments in the departments of Science, Art, Philosophy, Commerce, Industrial Expansion, etc., are under the supervision of the Adepts and the Angelic



Brotherhood. Indeed, everything that happens that is of any welfare to humanity is definitely the working out of God's Plan for men, and that Plan manifests itself through a powerful Inner Government of the world which has its many departments, with their chiefs, all of whom are working under the direction of the Lord of the World. Among all who inhabit this globe He is supremely the one Personality who enshrines in Himself more of the fullness of God than any other. Indeed, He is to us the nearest that we can conceive of

Omnipotence, Omniscience and Omnipresence and Perfect Love and Beneficence. Every event on our globe takes place within His consciousness, for that consciousness envelops the entire earth.

It has already been mentioned that the Divine life in its descent into manifestation expresses itself in forms of life which are termed the Mineral Kingdom, the Vegetable Kingdom and the Animal Kingdom. Every one of these forms of substance and life is also directed in its growth by the Great Plan. Even the animals in their incalculable

millions are all a part of the Divine Plan, and are guided in their work and growth. What Christ said once, that not a sparrow "shall fall on the ground without your Father", is utterly true. There is a special and intimate relation between humanity and its next lower order of creation, the animal kingdom. Animals are not intended to be exploited by man, nor to be used cruelly, nor for "sport" as in hunting and racing. They are indeed the younger brethren of humanity, and association between them and men is intended to be of mutual benefit,

but they are not intended to be exploited for our benefit or pleasure. If animals serve men when they are domesticated, man in return owes to the animal kingdom not only kindness but also great care, so that the animal consciousness shall be developed in the right direction and not in the wrong, as in hunting or racing, to the point where individualization can take place, and a Monad from the bosom of God can consciously begin his great work as a soul for Liberation or Self-realization.

On all sides, therefore, as the Theosophist looks at the myriad

manifestations of life, he sees all striving towards Liberation or Self-realization. But this Liberation is not an escape from an inevitable Mâyâ or from an evil process of undeserved suffering. It is rather like the training in a laboratory or in a gymnasium or in a workshop in order to become an expert. The aim of existence is to become a conscious co-operator in the Divine Plan, and thereby to become, for all possible kingdoms of life, a larger channel of the Divine Immanence. This wonderful heritage is not reserved only for a few whom we call

Saviours, but is the heritage of every soul, however low he may seem to be at the present time.

In the process of self-unfoldment leading to Liberation, a soul is not left alone to work out his destiny. While the Divine Nature is resident in him in its fullness, and no one can add to it from outside, nevertheless a soul can be guided to achieve his Liberation as speedily as possible. To aid him in his work certain of the Adepts or Rishis, called Masters of the Wisdom, accept candidates as their pupils, to train them in various forms of work for mankind,



and through that work to help them to achieve their perfection. The modern Theosophical Movement has strongly emphasized the fact that Adept teachers still exist, and that the way to them is open as of old to those who prepare themselves to tread the Path of Holiness through purity of life and self-sacrificing service.

From these fundamental postulates of Theosophy an attitude arises towards life which is characteristic of the true Theosophist, whether he is formally a member of the Theosophical Society or not. He holds that all religions are derived from

one source, and that therefore no one single religion is the exclusive road to Salvation. He recognizes various grades in religious thought, because the term "religion" covers not only forms of loftiest worship but also modes which are characteristic of the most ignorant savages with their crude beliefs. But each religion is considered by the Theosophist as having its rôle to fulfil in a great Plan for all men, just as the seven rays in the solar spectrum have all their distinct functions in fostering the growth of living things.

Similar, too, is the Theosophist's attitude towards the races of the world. He does not ignore the distinctions among them catalogued in works on Ethnology and Comparative Religion. But while some races show the highest characteristics of civilization, and others the most primitive, nevertheless all men and women born in these races are recognized by the Theosophist as having within them one common Divine Nature. Since all men, the lowest as the highest, the most ignorant and backward as the most cultured and the perfect, enshrine



within themselves the Divine Immanence, the Universal Brotherhood of Humanity without distinction of race, creed, sex, caste, colour or social position becomes a fact of nature, and, when rightly understood, the supreme Fact of facts in the life of all mankind.

In the development of civilization, there appear among men the distinctions just mentioned. Sometimes some of these distinctions have a fundamental basis, since in the main those souls in the lower classes or castes are the less evolved souls, and those in the higher the more



evolved. This is only a very general principle, and it has constantly exceptions, for it does not always follow that because a man or woman is born in any grade of life, high or low, therefore he or she necessarily shows the typical characteristics either high or low of that grade. He may be there temporarily for reasons of his Karma. In spite of racial and cultural differences, however, the supreme duty of all men and women who understand the Divine Plan is to minimize in every possible way the harshnesses and handicaps of class and caste and

race distinctions. Race especially is no true or valid indication of the grade in evolution of a soul. No fact in Nature is ever intended to work detrimentally to thwart the growth of a soul. Each fact in Nature is, on the other hand, intended to help, and therefore civilization is arranged in the Divine Plan with grades, so that the souls born into inferior grades may not have thrust upon them tasks too strenuous for them, or a morality too exacting for their capacities.

One branch of Theosophical studies which is of the greatest



consequence for mankind deals with the gathering of information concerning life beyond the grave. Already many facts have been gathered in past ages and are found scattered in religious traditions. These facts have been correlated and systematized by Theosophists, and much important new material has been added by their researches into conditions beyond the grave. These researches are not the results of mediumship or of any phenomena of Spiritualism, but are due on the other hand to a few Theosophists who have trained themselves by

methods of Yoga which permit them to leave their physical body at will into a state of trance, and enter and observe the invisible worlds in full consciousness, and record their observations on their return. These same observations can be made while wide-awake, and without entering into trance, with all the faculties of a trained observer. Through such processes of Yoga some of the invisible worlds have been scientifically examined, and the record of these researches makes one of the most important departments of modern Theosophical knowledge.

It will be obvious from all that has been said that the Theosophist is characterized, first, by a profound belief in the existence of a Divine Wisdom which explains all the intricate processes of Nature ; and secondly, by a determination to be an agent in God's Plan for men. The Theosophist, therefore, is essentially a reformer engaged in the most strenuous forms of social service. His chief gospel as an active man or woman is the Universal Brotherhood of all Humanity. The Theosophist realizes that in any relation between human beings, whether

within the family, the community, or among nations, if ever there is any infringement of the Law of Brotherhood, the result must inevitably be evil both for the individual and for all among whom the individual lives. Therefore a conscious attempt to understand what is best for the Whole, and not only for the part, becomes the constant endeavour of the Theosophist. The ideals of his philosophy give him a fuller guidance in the intricate affairs of life than he will find in any other religion or philosophy.

## *II. Theosophy as a Gospel of Conduct*

Most religious people in India place before themselves the ideal, in some life in the future if not in this, of a *personal* Liberation or Moksha. This is the goal set before the individual in Hinduism, Buddhism and Jainism. But we know that in both Hinduism and Buddhism there is also another ideal, though assuredly it is not for all men and women at their present stage of spiritual unfoldment. While Hinduism proclaims as the ideal the Mukta, the Liberated Soul, it also gives a

record of certain great souls who have not passed on to enter into the Liberation which they have earned, but have remained with mankind to help man. These are the Jīvan-muktas, "the liberated yet embodied." Similarly in Buddhism there was once very strongly the ideal of the Bodhisattva who, when he becomes the Arhat, and is therefore completely free from the "wheel of births and deaths", places before himself the ideal of becoming in some future life a Buddha, a Saviour, in order to proclaim to mankind once again the ancient teachings



which have been forgotten. For this, he makes a vow to live life after life until he becomes a Buddha.

Theosophy today revives these very high ideals of self-sacrifice for the sake of mankind. It proclaims that all men make one chain, the highest with the lowest, the wisest with the most ignorant. This is the principle of Universal Brotherhood. No man, therefore, can stand completely alone, even when he is on the threshold of Moksha or Nirvana. Theosophy in addition proclaims, as an essential part of the spiritual development of the one who seeks

Liberation, that there should be a development of all the highest *emotions* in him, not alone his powers of intellect. This emotional development is not to be directed solely as Devotion or Bhakti to God only, but also to become a tenderness to mankind and a dedication to human service. This is the ideal of the Masters of the Wisdom who founded the Theosophical Society, who are pledged to live a life of sacrifice. One of the Masters has called upon all Theosophists to live that same life in the oft-quoted maxim in *Light on the Path* : " Try to lift a little of

the heavy karma of the world ; give your aid to the few strong hands that hold back the powers of darkness from obtaining complete victory."

Whenever, therefore, Theosophists meet, their fundamental purpose is to understand the working of God's Mind, and the aim of this understanding is dual. First, it is to adjust themselves in their characters so that their minds will work parallel to God's Mind. But secondly, it is also to help others to adjust themselves in a similar fashion to God's Mind.

There is no need for any Theosophical Society or Movement if the aim of a Theosophist's life is merely purification for a personal Liberation. Such a Liberation is so individual that each must come to it directly by himself, with perhaps the sole exception of the temporary assistance of a Guru. Personal Liberation is not furthered by gathering together into groups and forming associations. But on the other hand, if the ideal is not personal Liberation for oneself, but to help to bring all mankind to Liberation, then it is necessary to plan and work together

as a band of brothers linked to a high dedication of human and divine service.

This is the reason why, if mankind is to be freed from its miseries of ignorance, poverty and degradation, men and women must band themselves together to solve these problems. It is the aim of Theosophists as they meet at Federations and Conventions to keep before their minds the words of the Master, "Try to lift a little of the heavy karma of the world." Then as they work in Lodges, Federations and Conventions, the Elder Brethren,

the Masters of the Wisdom who are Jivanmuktas, who also are trying "to lift a little of the heavy karma of the world", will send each true Theosophist their strength, inspiration and benediction.

All that I have written about Theosophy as a system of thought and as a gospel of conduct is summarized in Three Truths stated by the Master of the Wisdom whom I have quoted :

"The Soul of man is immortal, and its future is the future of a thing whose growth and splendour has no limit.



“ The Principle which gives life dwells in us, and without us, is undying and eternally beneficent, is not heard or seen or smelt, but is perceived by the man who desires perception.

“ Each man is his own absolute lawgiver, the dispenser of glory or gloom to himself ; the decreer of his life, his reward, his punishment.”



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